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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that it can be a challenge to make an undergraduate literature methods course realistic, a methods instructor at a Michigan university has developed three major and several minor activities that have proven effective in preparing pre-student teachers for the "real world" of teaching and, at the same time, have been challenging and enjoyable for the students. The three major assignments include: (1) analyzing a current textbook suitable for use in a secondary school classroom; (2) writing a lesson plan, teaching it to a small group of fellow students, videotaping it, and analyzing teaching abilities; and (3) preparing a learning activity packet. The minor assignments include writing reviews of professional journal articles, preparing interpretive readings on audio tapes of poems appropriate for use in the secondary school classroom, and conducting biographical research by adopting a "Zodiac Pal." (HTH)

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MAKING A LITERATURE METHODS COURSE "REALISTIC"

Teaching an undergraduate methods course is a challenge in that it can be difficult to make the pre-service instruction realistic. It seems to be too easy to make it a course of readings, lectures, examinations, and papers; in other words, it may closely resemble a traditional literature course. At least this was the dilemma I faced when I started to teach the literature methods class at Central Michigan University: English 311--Teaching Literature in the Secondary School. After experimenting with having the students read adolescent literature in order to acquaint them with the materials they would likely find their own students reading (quite successful in this regard, but what to do after they had read the literature remained unanswered) and having them present lessons to their classmates as simulated teaching experiences (again somewhat successful, but still seemingly too limited concerning the follow-up and often more of an end in itself than a means to an end), I have developed three major and several minor activities that have proven effective in preparing pre-student teachers for the "real" world of teaching and, at the same time, that have been challenging and enjoyable for the students.

The three major assignments include: 1) analyzing a current textbook suitable for use in a secondary classroom; 2) writing a lesson plan, teaching it to a small group of their fellow students, videotaping it, and analyzing their teaching abilities (microteaching); and 3) preparing a learning activity packet (LAP).

The minor assignments include writing professional journal article reviews, preparing interpretive readings on audio tapes of poems appropriate for use in the secondary classroom, and conducting biographical research by adopting a "Zodiac Pal."

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TEXTBOOK CRITIQUE

While at first I was hesitant about having students simply analyze a typical high school literature textbook for fear it would verge on being "busy work," the more we worked on the assignment the more the students identified the critique as one of their most useful experiences. Among other factors, it forces them to use the Instructional Materials Center (IMC) on campus (our repository for teaching materials ranging from adolescent literature to textbooks to audio-visual equipment) or to visit high schools in search of texts appropriate to their future teaching assignments and of interest to them. Those who student teach the semester following the methods course are encouraged to obtain a text from their host school in order to make the assignment as useful as possible. The basic requirement in the critique is to give examples of selections and materials to support the student's evaluation of the text (see Figure 1). The least effective analysis is an unsupported generalization.

Figure 1. Textbook Critique Criteria

- Bibliography
- Format—cover, illustrations
- Readability level (text's
and yours with readability
scale if possible)
- Organizational pattern
- Examples of representative
selections
- Supplementary materials—
reading, writing, doing
- Biography
- Teacher's manual (if avail-
able)

My students' choices of texts have ranged from the "traditional" anthologies to more modern paperback texts such as theme approaches to literature (initiation, death, war for example) or special categories of literature (mode—romance, tragedy, satire—or women in literature for instance). Almost all of the students compare their choices to the texts they used when they were in high school, and almost inevitably, they are surprised by the differences and tend to recommend the text they have evaluated. I often wonder if that is due to their differences in perspective—almost teachers now instead of students. While this is not an entirely realistic situation (since most teachers teach from the book they are handed rather than from one they select), still the students comment that this process of evaluation will help them when they are faced with a choice (either choosing from among several older texts or, ideally, being involved in a new textbook selection process).

LESSON PLAN AND MICROTEACHING

For the lesson plan and microteaching assignment, the class is divided into groups of four to six students (five is the perfect number for my one hour and 20 minute class which meets twice a week, but it is often necessary to be flexible in the classroom as I try to illustrate to these prospective teachers). Students prepare lesson plans on any subject in literature of interest to them and appropriate to their intended teaching level to cover one week of one hour classes (our lesson plans having ranged from specific works such as "Flight" by Steinbeck to genre such as haiku as a poetic form to specific authors such as Poe,. My basic requirement for the lesson plan is to indicate the time span involved for each activity (frustrating but helpful in forcing students to think in specific time frames). After the lesson plans have been submitted and any suggested

changes incorporated, the students "teach" units from them to each other in their small groups for videotaping. The presentations are limited to between five and ten minutes, the minimum because it is impossible to develop a lesson adequately in less than that amount of time and the maximum because of the amount of time and tape available. Also, a seven or eight minute lesson is usually sufficient for them to evaluate their teaching abilities in such a situation.

Following the taping, they view their presentations at their convenience and analyze the effectiveness of their teaching techniques. In addition to their own subjective evaluation (see Figure 2), each student must apply Flanders' Interaction Analysis (see Figure 3) for a more objective critique.

Figure 2. Microteaching Critique

Rationale for lesson—objective(s)/goal(s)	
What were you trying to accomplish?	
Activities to achieve objective(s)	
What did you do?	
Evaluation of success	
Did you accomplish your objective(s)	
through your activities?	
Table of categories	1-X
(from Flanders' Interaction	2-X
Analysis)	3-X
	etc.
Interpretation of individual categories	
Overall interpretation and evaluation of	
categories	
Overall evaluation of lesson	
Were you satisfied with your lesson?	
Would you present this lesson again?	
In exactly the same way?	
Explain changes, if any.	

Figure 3. Flanders' Interactional Analysis

A Summary of Categories for Interactional Analysis

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Indirect
Influence | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accepts and clarifies the feeling tone of the students in a non-threatening manner. Feelings may be positive or negative. Predicting and recalling feelings are included. 2. Praises or encourages student action or behavior. Jokes to relieve tension, not at the expense of another individual. Nodding the head and saying "Uh-huh" and "Go ahead" are included. 3. Accepts or uses the ideas of students: clarifying, building or developing ideas given by the student. 4. Asks questions about the content or procedure with the intention that the student answer. |
| Teacher
Talk | <hr/> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Lectures, giving facts or opinions about content or procedures, asking rhetorical questions, presenting his own ideas. |
| Direct
Influence | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Gives directions, commands or orders with which the student is expected to comply. 7. Criticizes or justifies authority, bawling someone out. Stating why the teacher is doing what he is doing. Extreme self-reference. <hr/> |
| Student
Talk | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Talk by students in response to the teacher. The teacher initiates the contact or solicits student response. 9. Talk by students which they initiate. <hr/> |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Silence or confusion, pauses, short periods of silence or confusion in which communication cannot be understood by the observer. |

LEARNING ACTIVITY PACKET (LAP)

The students must also prepare a learning activity packet (LAP) suitable for use in the classroom at the secondary level. Once more it is their choice of material and approach to it although they must follow the general guidelines of a LAP (see Figure 4). The students must discuss their choices of materials with me during a conference where I can make suggestions and direct them to helpful information after which they work on their LAPs for most of the rest of the semester. They submit them on dittos and we run off enough copies for each member of the class; this way they not only take with them all of the theoretical ideas we have discussed during the semester, but also 15 to 25 packets which they can employ totally or in part almost immediately upon entering the classroom. Like the microteaching lesson, the LAPs range from works (The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn to When the Legends Die) to authors (Blake to Tolkein) to approaches to literature (book report techniques to science fiction).

Figure 4. Learning Activity Packet (LAP)

Rationale

1. They are self-instructional. The burden of learning is on the student, not on the teacher. We believe English classes in which the teacher does all the work burns up teachers and bores students.
2. They are individualized through choices or options; students may proceed at their own pace—within given ranges.
3. They are highly motivational. Through LAPs teachers can produce consistently challenging and rewarding activities for students—better than the day-to-day lesson planning method.
4. They are highly accountable. LAPs have built-in evaluative procedures which are visible and understandable to teachers, students, and administrators.
5. If well done, they are more comprehensive both in scope and depth than any teacher with traditional methods can hope to achieve.
6. They promote student-teacher interaction. With LAPs, the teacher is released from the front-of-the-room prison. The teacher has time and opportunity to help students on a one-to-one basis. The job changes from information-giver and entertainer to supervisor, coordinator, tutor, resource person. While this is not an easier way to teach,

it is a significant change in the quality of the teacher-learner situation, one which many (not all) teachers find much more enjoyable than their previous experiences in the classroom.

Advantages

1. LAPs are visually attractive; they can contain art work and a variety of graphics (print, handwriting, drawings). Sophisticated LAPs come with attractive covers or contain suggestions that the students make their own.
2. They have specific, understandable objectives. The students should constantly be told why, not just what.
3. They should draw on each of the language arts skills areas: Reading and Writing, Acting (Doing) and Speaking (Discussing), Thinking, Viewing and Listening.
4. They contain evaluative procedures. Make use of self-evaluation (How long did you work on this LAP? How much effort did you put into it? If you were going to do this LAP again, what would you do differently and why?) Make use of teacher evaluation. The teacher may check, but also it is a good idea to have the students check each other. In addition, there are other ways for the teacher to evaluate: through conferences with the students, through group discussion, through contracts.
5. They are always written to the student--as directions for things to do. Little or no explaining or teaching goes on in the LAP. The teacher is present in the classroom to give explanations when or where needed. Activities can be written inductively so that students teach themselves (e.g., Here are four examples of metaphor....What is a metaphor? If you think you know, read the poem "Fog" and list the metaphors you find) or which will direct the student to source materials.
6. LAPs should contain a QUEST or SEARCH or other section of extra credit work for students who finish early or who are overachievers or who just like more challenging work. These extra credit assignments should be highly creative activities that demand initiative and responsibility from the students as well as being inherently rewarding to do.
7. Finally, do not hesitate to write activities for which materials or resources may not be immediately available. Nothing is as conducive to getting resources as a demonstrated need for them. You may be able to convince administrators to buy you a VCR, camera, and monitor if you can show them that they are integral to your classroom work!

LAPs consist of three parts: objectives, activities, and evaluation. The objectives section usually presents some difficulties to my students in that they feel a need to be as "objective" as possible and yet face the subjectivity of our discipline (literature). I do not insist on behavioral objectives; I try to use examples of effective objectives as models, such as this set from a LAP on

Kon-Tiki:

1. Help you better understand the theme of man against nature as it is found in this work.

2. Help you know yourself better in relationship to all of the natural world.
3. Help you see how a non-fiction work can be both interesting and exciting.
4. Help you understand the reasoning behind the Kon-Tiki expedition and how these reasons relate to you.
5. Help you make a judgment as to whether Kon-Tiki is an effective piece of non-fiction.
6. Help you recall some of the important ideas and/or facts found in the book.

The activity section of the LAP presents the greatest opportunity for creativity and experimentation for the students who prepare them; it is also the part of the LAP that can "make or break" it. Students find material for activities from their own learning experiences (other classes), from professional materials (articles on their topics in professional journals), and from their own imaginations. This example from a LAP on The Scarlet Letter seems complete, detailed, and interesting enough to be successful:

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Hester Prynne
Pearl

Roger Chillingworth
Reverend Dimmesdale

In many novels, authors name characters according to their roles and qualities. Pick two of the characters above and do a $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 typed page analysis of their names. Keep in mind these questions as you write:

1. Check each syllable of the names. Do they give smaller word clues?
2. Can these smaller words become characteristics of the person?
3. Do you think the names of the characters influence the reader's idea of how they act?
4. Why do you think Hawthorne chose these names?
5. Do you agree with this technique?
6. Can you analyze names of characters in other novels you have read (e.g., Catcher in the Rye, I Am the Cheese, Rabbit, Run, etc.)?

Evaluation, like objectives, can be a challenge to the writer of the LAP because of the need to measure the success of the assignments. Some LAPs use a point system for the various activities, others use a contract grading system, while still others use self-evaluation techniques. Many LAPs ask the students to indicate how much time and effort they have put into completing the material.

LAPs provide an opportunity for prospective teachers to approach literature in new and imaginative ways such as the students who have prepared LAPs on Black Boy as a football game, on cryptography from Poe's "The Gold Bug," on Hamlet as "A Real Swift Murder Story," on "A 'Monopoly' of Richard Wright's Native Son," on "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Poetry...But Were Afraid to Ask!" on

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Carl Sandburg, Ezra Pound,
Edgar Lee Masters, Judy Collins, Robert Frost
And Their Friends
Are Pleased to Announce
The Combining of Their Children
Language and Meter
Into a New Family
Known Hereafter as
POETRY.
You Are Cordially Invited
To Join in the Celebration!

and on "Welcome to My Nightmare...I Think You're Gonna Like It!" (involving the short stories "A Rose for Emily" and "The Landlady"). All of these LAPs have the potential to be successful tools in the English classroom.

MISCELLANEOUS ASSIGNMENTS

Several other assignments work well in making the class more realistic and meaningful for prospective English teachers. One of the most successful activities in the poetry unit is to ask each student to record on audio tape an interpretive

reading of one of the poems from our anthology that would be appropriate for teaching at the secondary level (Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle and Other Modern Verse having been one of the most effective collections for us). After the students have recorded their readings with appropriate background sounds, we make a master tape so that again they have a teaching aid to take with them and use if they so desire. They present some excellent interpretive readings as did the student who read May Swenson's "Southbound on the Freeway" into a reverberator which made it sound as if a robot were speaking (perfect for illustrating point of view) and the student who read Langston Hughes' "Too Blue" against a background of appropriate blues music.

In addition to subscribing to the English Journal as part of their class textbooks, the students must also read one feature article from one issue and one article from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) materials and write annotated bibliographical entries on their readings. I always suggest they read material related to their other assignments.

Instead of having the students conduct biographical research by simply telling them to select an author and find out something about that person (vague and not very exciting unless they already have someone specifically in mind—in which case they have probably already done some investigation on their own), I ask my students to become "Zodiac Pals." This phrase not only catches them by surprise (since they don't know what such a thing is) but also piques their curiosity to find out. Quite simply, they match themselves with an author born on the same day (or at least with the same zodiac sign) and find out something about that writer. I simplify the requirements from the original suggestions and ask them for a short written summary of the author in relationship to themselves; in other words, I ask them if they have anything in common with their

author. They usually like this egocentric approach to research. (At least I have found it interesting that Sinclair Lewis and I share some interesting characteristics besides the same zodiac sign and the same last name. This is an assignment the instructor can accomplish quite easily right along with the students as we are often caught saying that the teacher should complete the same work the students do). The "Zodiac Pal" aspect of the activity can make it less of a chore and more "fun" to conduct research (as limited as it may be).

RECOMMENDATIONS

I commend any or all of these assignments to you if you are searching for realistic, interesting, and effective activities for your literature methods course (or just plain literature course for that matter). I have tried all of them and I know that they work—both for me and for my students.

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